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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (ANDRE CADIEUX, VELIA DePIRRO)
WHA/PDA (CWEST)
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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: REACTION TO PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

Summary

1. The intense interest and excitement surrounding the inauguration of Barack H. Obama as 44th President of the United States grew steadily in the run-up to January 20. Prior to inauguration day, the volume of newspaper columns, radio and television reports and commentary had steadily grown. With expectations high and local opinion makers and politicians debating the possible impact of the Obama presidency on the region, most Jamaicans lived in the moment and enjoyed viewing the event at home, in clubs, or on the street. In Parliament, both Prime Minister Bruce Golding and Opposition Spokesman on Finance Omar Davies warmly welcomed the new Obama Administration. End Summary.

2. There has been a high level of interest by Jamaicans in the entire U.S. democratic process, including the U.S. Presidential Election race, the transition process and the Presidential Inauguration. On a daily basis, all newspapers have carried editorials, editorial cartoons, opinion pieces, and letters to editors from all angles weighing in on President Obama, the transition process, and the future of U.S. foreign policy towards the Caribbean and Latin America. Print media coverage includes dedicated news pages headed "United States in Transition" and "The U.S. Presidential Inauguration," with daily updates, wire stories and photographs. These issues also have been constant topics of discussion on influential radio and television public affair programs. On January 21, the two main daily newspapers (the Gleaner and the Jamaica Observer) carried editorials on the inauguration (6/21). In the past week, there have been at least three editorials on the presidential transition.

3. The Observer editorial of January 21 notes: "President Barack Obama yesterday gave us further hope that he would not only keep his campaign promise to restore America's moral authority throughout the globe, but pursue a pacifist role in world affairs...Mr. Obama's message is a refreshing change from the big bully posture of the George W Bush/Dick Cheney administration that was wisely rejected by the American people in last November's presidential elections...Messrs Bush and Cheney have now left office drenched in the tears of the relatives and friends of all those human beings who need not have died. And quite frankly, the world, particularly the American people, should not allow them to forget the price of their adventure...President Obama will go into the White House this morning with great political capital, manifested by his impressive victory last November as well as his growing popularity around the world...He therefore has a lot of room in which to maneuver. However, his burden, obviously, is very heavy, as much is expected of him. Let us hope that he doesn't waste the opportunity to really make a positive difference. We wish him good luck." Media commentary has ranged from the cautious to highly expectation. One columnist in the 6/21 business pages even asserted that President Obama had promised to forgive 100 per cent of Caribbean debt.

4. On Jan. 20, former U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica Brenda Johnson spoke to the press just before departing post. Along with several

issues she highlighted to the print and television reporters about her work in Jamaica, Ambassador Johnson commented on the significance of President Obama's election as president. She noted it was evidence of the rich democratic process in the United States. She expressed pride in her country and in the American people. Her comments were aired on both television prime time news reports on 6/20.

15. Public Affairs Officer Patricia Attkisson and Vice Consul Don Baker were interviewed on three morning radio and television programs (Jan. 20) about the presidential inauguration process. Strategic Speaker Initiative speaker and U.S. professor David Lublin, who visited Jamaica in October, was also interviewed via telephone on morning radio. An additional three Embassy officials - Deputy Chief of Mission James Heg, Narcotics Affairs Director Andrea Lewis and Vice Consul Amy Unander were interviewed by CVM Television on the embassy's reaction to a new president at the U.S. Embassy on 6/20. Highlights from the interview were also carried on the main evening newscast.

16. A 36-page supplement titled: "A New Era: President Obama," in the centrist Jamaica Observer on January 21 included a reprint of a section of the IIP publication "Barack Obama: 44th President of the United States." The supplement also includes several wire stories, numerous AP photographs and reactions from readers and local commentators, as well as the transcript of President Obama's inaugural address (also excerpted in the Jamaica Gleaner). There is also a timeline of quotations from past inaugural speeches from George Washington to the present day. Comments by members of the U.S. Embassy's Facebook group were overwhelmingly positive, with many members sending congratulations and expressing hope and optimism. They also commended the President on his inaugural speech,

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with particular reference to his intended multilateralist approach to global affairs.

17. In television interviews and informal "vox pops," the Jamaican man and woman on the street expressed joy, optimism and hope for the future. Roving television cameras focused on noisy celebrations in sports bars, passers by stopping to watch the event on a big screen in busy central Kingston, and "inauguration parties" at home and abroad.

18. Addressing Parliament just two hours after the inauguration, Prime Minister Bruce Golding said "Jamaica has already taken steps to engage the new U.S. Administration on issues of concern to the Caribbean and the wider Latin American region," and said he hoped these issues would be taken up with President Obama at the Summit of the Americas April 17-19 in Port-of-Spain. Opposition Spokesman on Finance Dr. Omar Davies said of President Obama "we have a vested interest in his success and that of his administration in addressing these problems, because the extent to which the American economy recovers is the extent to which our prospect for growth improves." Davies maintained that the two previous administrations had not given the region much attention, and expressed hope for an improvement in the "total approach to the Caribbean."

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